

**Ron McAndrew**  
**Testimony in support of Senate Bill 236**  
**Montana House of Representatives**  
**Judiciary Committee**

Thank you, Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, for giving me the opportunity to speak with you today. My name is Ron McAndrew. I am here to testify in favor of Senate Bill 236.

In 1978, I entered the Florida State Department of Corrections as an entry-level officer. By 1992, I had worked my way up through all of the gut level correctional positions to Warden. In 1996, I was asked to take over Florida State Prison in Starke, Florida. The Secretary of the Department had one question for me before I started my new post. He asked, "Are you going to have any problems carrying out the death penalty?"

"No Sir!" I replied.

I was a staunch supporter of the death penalty. Both my cousin and my sister-in-law had been murdered in times past. And I had been in the prison system for 18 years, and I felt that murderers and rapists and barbaric people didn't deserve to be on this earth.

I thought I would not have any trouble carrying out the ultimate punishment.

As the warden, it was my job to ensure the safety of my officers and the prisoners in my charge. I learned what it takes to keep a prison safe – consistently well-trained, professional staff that have adequate wages and benefits; state-of the art facilities that provide solid protection using the latest technologies in surveillance and security; and procedures that give staff the ability to deal with difficult situations through a close management policy that segregates difficult inmate populations.

The very notion that we need the death penalty to keep prisons safe is both professionally and personally offensive. I don't believe there is a single qualified prison warden in this country that wouldn't trade the death penalty for more resources to keep his or her facility safe. The death penalty system is just a drain on those resources, and it serves no purpose in the safety of the public or prisons.

Moreover, those of us who have lived through an execution know just what the death penalty does to those who must perform it. In my tenure as warden, I helped perform three electrocutions in Florida and oversaw five lethal injections in Texas. In both places, I saw staff traumatized by the duties they were asked to perform. Officers who had never even met the condemned fought tears, cowering in corners so as not to be seen. Some of my colleagues turned to drugs and alcohol to numb the pain of knowing that a man had died by their hands.

I myself was haunted by the men I was asked to execute in the name of the State of Florida. I would wake up in the middle of the night to find them lurking at the foot of my bed. One of them had been cooked to death in a botched electrocution. I stood just four feet away watching flames rise out of his head, hearing the electrician ask me, "Is that enough? Should I continue?"

It wasn't until I left my post as warden that I finally sought counseling for the trauma I had been through.

It was then that I realized that I could not support the system that had left me in so much pain and had cheated me out of the resources that could have better protected my staff and inmates.

It's essential to have a system that keeps our communities and prisons safe, and life without parole does that. It's the most severe punishment you could give anyone – to lock them in a little cage made out of concrete and steel ... with a steel cot, a mattress that is 3 inches thick, a stainless steel toilet without a lid, and to leave them there for the rest of their natural life.